

Psalm 133

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening and a warm welcome to the service this evening, those who are watching online and those who are listening in on the telephone. Again, it's good for us to be able to come together in this way to worship God. The intimations I went through in the morning, I won't take time to go through them this evening, you can check back in the morning service if you want to go through the intimations. Let's begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise from Psalm 133 and we'll sing the whole of this short psalm. Behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well, together such as brethren are in unity to dwell, like precious ointment on the head that down the beard did flow, even Aaron's beard and to the skirts that off his garments go. As Herman's Jew, the Jew that doth on science hills descend, for there the blessing God commands, life that shall never end. We sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise and after we've sung this psalm, Farukhar will lead us in prayer in Gaelic.

Behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well, together such as brethren are in unity to the world.

Behold how good a thing it is and how becoming well, together such as brethren are in unity to dwell. Like precious ointment on the head that down the beard did flow, even Aaron's beard and to the skirts did off his guard, even Aaron's beard and to the skirts did off his guard, even Aaron's beard and to the skirts did off his garments go. As Herman's Jew, the Jew that doth on science hills descend, for there the blessing God commands, life that shall never end.

A minuscuh Sain, the Jew. .

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[3 : 19]

. um us foreign If you give a look at your heart, point with peur out all to us.
so Got to good up his name, All he toasted with foot An he forest ate He that Fuß trod Until he
stooshed That brought God from his A much farther away He was primary Verified in some ages So
for him He came to his daughter But now he's praying To do nothing But now he willUST join Jesus
We are foreign Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[7 : 19] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[9 : 49] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[12 : 19] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Amen.

[14 : 48] Amen.

We'll pray just as we come back to this passage.

your presence with us, your blessing upon us.

And may we enjoy, even though we are remote in a sense from each other because of these restrictions, may we enjoy fellowship together as we gather in our respective homes to gather around your word.

So help us, Lord, we ask. Be close to us in all that we seek to do and what we pray for ourselves.

We pray for other congregations who meet physically and virtually around us and in this place, other denominations, and across the island and across the nation and across all nations.

[16:58] We pray, Lord, that you would add your blessing, that you would build your church and that every tribe, tongue and nation would be coming more and more to find that salvation that is offered freely in Christ.

So hear our prayers and help us now. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. There are some things that we see and when we see them, they stop us in our tracks.

We turn to the people around us and we say, look at this thing that we're seeing. I remember being visiting one afternoon in the past.

I was visiting one of the elders, Neil Cameron and Katag. And we were in the house and enjoying a visit and just behind the house, all of a sudden, we saw two golden eagles.

And so we stopped and we were out with the binoculars and we looked, we beheld the sight. It was an amazing sight to see. And Psalm 133 begins with a word that the NIV omits for some strange reason.

[18:16] But the King James Version and the ESV have this word rightly included. And it's the word behold. It's the same word that we sang in the Metrical Version of the Psalm as well.

Behold how good a thing it is. And behold, that word, it's a word that calls us attention, to attention. It's a word that causes us to stop what we're doing and focus on this thing that we're being pointed to.

Remember, it's the word that John the Baptist used. When Jesus, the Saviour, whom he was preparing the way for, came onto scene, John stopped. And it says in John 1 and verse 29, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And that's the note on which the psalm begins. There's that call to behold. There's that call to focus, to look at this amazing thing.

So what is it that David is so focused on? What did David see? And what is it that David wanted others to see as this psalm begins? Well, the thing that he saw, the thing that he wants to share with us and for us to see and share is unity.

[19:35] That's the theme, the overarching theme in this psalm. It's a psalm that focuses on the unity that we see amongst God's people.

So the first point is the unity that David saw. Verse 1, Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.

Sometimes when we have not seen something or someone for a period, we actually come to appreciate them all the more.

Lockdown taught us that. And these restrictions, who were not able to see each other, teach us that. And for David, David knew all about what it felt like and what it looked like to not have unity. David knew what it was to live in disunity. He had lived in a divided kingdom. There was the north-south divide in Israel.

[20:47] And David had experienced so much of the tension that that brought. He had tasted so much of the bitterness of disunity.

That was something he had tasted in the past. And sadly, it was something he would taste again in the future in his family life because of his sin with Bathsheba. Again, David would experience something of the difficulty and the bitterness of disunity.

It was in the past. It was in the future. But in the present tense, as David composes this psalm, and as he looks out, David is not looking out on a divided kingdom.

He's in a united kingdom. The tribes which once were at war are now at peace. And there is a sweet taste of unity for David to savour.

Commentators think that this psalm was composed to mark the reuniting of the tribes on David's accession to the throne of Israel and Judah.

[22 : 01] When he becomes king, there's that unification of these tribes. You can read about it in 2 Samuel 5. We'll just read a few verses. 2 Samuel 5 and verse 1.

It says that all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns.

And the Lord said to you, You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler. When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.

David was 30 years old when he became king, and he reigned 40 years. In Hebron, he reigned over Judah 7 years and 6 months, and in Jerusalem, he reigned over all Israel and Judah 33 years.

So that was the big picture. David as king, he's looking out, and he's seeing the unity of the people that he was called to govern and be king over.

[23 : 18] That was the big picture. That was what was going on at the national, at the political level. But this psalm was also a psalm that was sung by pilgrims.

After that event, as they came into Jerusalem on feast days, they sang these psalms of ascent.

We've noted that in the past weeks as we looked at these psalms of ascent.

So we have a more localized picture as well with this psalm. We have this picture of God's people. We see the tribes of Israel who once were divided against each other, and they're brought together in unity as they came to Jerusalem on these feast days.

They're talking together. They're eating together. They're helping each other. They're united in the worship of God. And this unity that David saw in the big picture and in the local picture, it struck him. It thrilled him. It made an impact. And he says to us, you should see this. You should feel this unity, he says.

[24 : 31] So we have in the first point the unity that David saw. And we want to see this unity. In actual fact, we feel a lack of this unity at present.

We feel the lack of being able to come together and be united in that physical and spiritual sense when we gather in one place in worship.

It's a sweet thing. It's something perhaps that we took for granted, but it's something that we now very much miss and long for.

The unity that David saw. But we must ask the question, where did this unity come from? How could a people who at one point were so divided become a people who are so united?

How could a people who were at one stage so much set against each other be reconciled in this way that David sees? Well, there's only one answer to that.

[25 : 47] And the answer is God. It's God's doing. So the second point is the unity that God gave. We have the unity that David saw.

And secondly, we have the unity that God gave. It's still in verse 1. Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.

There's two descriptive words there which are very carefully used. How good and how pleasant is this unity, says David.

And when we think about these words, the word good is a word that should send us back to where we've been in the mornings in Genesis. It's a word that sends us back to the beginning, to Genesis 1.

When God created, we have this rhythm within the creation. What God creates, he says it's good. Everything he created, it's good.

[26 : 51] It was very good. And this unity that David saw, that he describes as good, this is God's creation. They didn't make it for themselves, but God gave it.

How good and how pleasant it is, says David. Not only is this unity good in itself, but David says this is a unity that feels good, it's experientially good, it's pleasant.

It's one of these blessings that God gives to his people. And if we were to fast forward even just a couple of psalms, Psalm 135 and verse 3, it says, Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good.

Sing to his name, for it is pleasant. And again, we see something of the authorship of God in this unity.

God's name, as we look at it in Psalm 135, which speaks to us about God's nature, his character, is pleasant. The Lord is good, says the psalmist in Psalm 135.

[28 : 10] And the unity that David saw and experienced, it's not a unity that came from his political giftings. It's not a unity that came from his skills as a national mediator.

David recognizes readily that this unity that he saw, it came from God. And true, pure unity is found in God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Three persons, one God. That's where we see the most pure and concentrated and perfect representation of unity.

unity. And when God's people, when we come together in worship, we should reflect something of the unity that comes from God.

If we are God's people, we should show out something of the character of God in the unity that we share.

[29 : 28] So unity is a very precious thing. It's a very important thing. That's becoming clear as the psalm goes on.

Unity is not something to be taken lightly. It's not something that's to be taken for granted, but it's to be cherished. It's God's will for us.

Remember Jesus' prayer in John 17. Jesus prayed in John 17 and verse 11, Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. Jesus prayed for this unity. Remember, this is actually something that Jesus not only prayed for, but he bled for. His blood reconciles man with God and man with man.

Ephesians 2 verses 13 and 14 says, But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ, for he himself is our peace who has made the two one.

[30 : 41] Galatians 3.28, we have that reminder through the Apostle Paul, you are all one in Christ Jesus. So this unity that David saw, it's a gift that God gave.

It's not something that we pay for. It's not something that we are able to manufacture for ourselves. It's something that Jesus paid for.

It's something that God creates. It's something that we receive from him. There's a sense of that even in the movement within the psalm. In verse 2, we see the oil of unity and it's running down. In verse 3, we see the dew of unity and it's falling down. In verse 3, there's the blessing of unity which is bestowed. It comes down from above.

Kidna, the commentator, says, True unity, like all good gifts, is from above, bestowed rather than contrived, a blessing far more than an achievement.

[31 : 56] So this unity that David sees, it's the unity that he recognises that God gives. It's a gift.

Now we have gifts that have a huge sense of meaning to us, don't we? We can have things that are passed through the family as heirlooms, maybe an old watch from your grandfather or a Bible from a parent.

And these gifts that we received, we cherish them. They're precious. We'd hate to lose them. We'd hate for these gifts to be damaged because they mean so much.

And yet, if I can be of challenge for a moment here, the unity, this gift that God gives, sometimes we can be so blasey about it and we shouldn't be.

So let's get practical here for a moment in application. What do we do where there is a situation where we are conscious there is a lack of unity?

[33 : 14] unity? What do we do if we are conscious just now that there is a brother or a sister in Christ that we are aware of that we are not reconciled with?

You know, if there's a problem like that that we are aware of, if there is a problem that has caused disunity with another Christian that we know?

We should do whatever we can to seek reconciliation. It may be costly, it may be humiliating, but we must pursue it.

We must not play fast and loose with the gift of unity that God gives. In Daily Bread, the little devotional, it says, strong people will differ and sometimes differ sharply, but the church must always point them to the way of reconciliation.

Any church that does not do that is not following the example set by the church of the New Testament. Reconciliation reconciliation is the heart of the gospel.

[34 : 46] We see that unity in God. It's a unity that's offered to us in the gospel, is given to us in the gospel.

We don't make it, we receive it from God, but God makes very clear to us through Scripture that we must seek to maintain it. Ephesians 4 verses 1 to 3, the Apostle Paul says, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

So there's the unity that David saw, the unity that God gives, that we are to receive, that we are to cherish, that we are to seek to maintain.

Before we move on from this point, I want to just ask a question that may be in our minds. And the question is this, does this mean that all fallouts and all disputes are wrong?

[36 : 06] Well, the answer to that question is no, not always. John Calvin says, we cannot continue in fellowship with those who persist in error, for we would then break faith with the Lord.

Only the truth of God's word can create the bond of holy union. And that's true, isn't it?

Where the gospel is at stake, where the truth of God's word is at stake, then keeping together an institution is much less important than holding to the truth of the Bible.

So there are occasions where one has to break unity, as John Calvin well knew, as one who went through the Reformation. But the sad reality is that many more churches have split because of personality clashes rather than issues of biblical truth.

So we have to be on our guard on this area. We have to make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

[37 : 28] So there's the unity that David saw. There's the unity that God gave. And the third thing here, the third point, is we see the unity that's fragrant.

Verse 2, it's like precious oil poured on the head, running down the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. And so here, David, he gets vivid and he starts to paint a picture of what unity looks like, or maybe a better description would be he gives us an impression of what unity smells like.

David says this unity is like the precious oil that was used to anoint Aaron. And that takes us back to Exodus 30 where Aaron is being anointed as high priest.

And the oil that was used to anoint Aaron as high priest was very fragrant oil. We have the recipe of it actually in Exodus 30 and in verse 22.

The Lord said to Moses, take the following fine spices, 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much that is 250 shekels of fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant cane, 500 shekels of cassia, all according to the sanctuary, shekel, and a hen of olive oil.

[38 : 52] Make these into a sacred anointing, a fragrant oil, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil. So this is the oil that was used for anointing Aaron.

This is the oil which was poured on his head and ran down in his beard and ran down upon the collar of his robes. And as that happened the aroma that filled that place would have been almost overwhelming.

And all the people in the area would have been drawn in by this amazing fragrance that was coming from that place where God's priest was being anointed.

And David says here that's what unity is like. It is a wonderful fragrance about it that draws you in.

Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and verses 14 and 15 he says that God uses us Christians to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

[40 : 16] And we do that as those who are united. God uses not me says Paul but he says he uses us plural.

Stuart shared something of that in his testimony didn't he? As he shared a few weeks back. He talked about how there was a time in his life when he didn't want anything much to do with Christians.

But then as God began to work in his life and as he made his way back to church he found that when he began to be around Christians there was something attractive about them.

And it wasn't just Joyce. But there was something attractive about this group of people who were united in Christ. Tim Keller says the unity and love God gives is like precious oil in ancient times making people fragrant and attractive.

So the fragrance of the unity that God gives and that we work hard to maintain it makes a huge impression.

[41 : 41] It often says more to people about who God is than our words actually say. But on the dark side of this when that unity is broken the opposite is true.

I was at Shillabost beach one day in the summer and at one part of the beach there was a stink. And when you looked there wasn't actually much to see but the awful smell came from a dead whale that was buried just below the surface.

And you know that can be like some church fellowships. You know you can't see much that's actually wrong. Everything looks okay on the surface but something doesn't smell right. And very often you discover that there are Christians who are not united in that fellowship who are at odds with each other.

[42 : 53] And when that's the case, when the fragrance of unity is absent but the stench of disunity is there, the unbeliever like Stuart when he walked into that church some years ago as an unbeliever, when they walk into a church where the fragrance of unity is not there but the stench of disunity is there, the unbeliever finds nothing attractive.

In that place to draw them in. But rather they find that there's something repulsive about that place that drives them away.

So this is a serious thing. Francis Chan says if we are serious about winning the lost we must be serious about pursuing unity.

unity that is fragrant, the unity that God gives, the unity that David saw.

And fourthly we see here the unity that is fresh or is refreshing. In verse 3 David he changes the metaphor, he changes the picture to give another example of what unity is like and he says in verse 3 it's as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.

[44 : 22] Lane the commentator says in a hot and dry land this dew could be collected in containers and used as water. Hermon their highest mountain with the coolest nights was famous for its dew.

It refreshed and could be even life. So here David is saying this unity that God gives it's refreshing. It's like the heavy refreshing life giving dew that falls on Hermon. See in Israel in the hot summer period if there was no dew that fell there was no life and if there's no life there's no growth everything dries out.

And that's a picture of a church without the dew of God's blessing. A church without the dew of the unity that God gives it very quickly becomes dry and arid.

But where there's unity God blesses his people as they come together in worship it's not dry and stale but there's freshness and there's life.

[45 : 47] You know in this world it can be hard to be a Christian. It can sometimes feel hard to breathe spiritually in this world.

It can be wearying. But a united church is a place where we can breathe. a united church is a place where we can be ourselves.

It's a place where we can find acceptance without being judged and criticized and talked about. A united church is a place where a weary Christian pilgrim can find the refreshment, freshness that we need to keep on going.

So we see here fourthly the unity that is fresh. Fifthly here we see the unity that's our future hope. The unity that David saw, the unity that God gives. We see snapshots of it in this world like David did in Jerusalem but these snapshots they point us forward to a bigger picture, to a fuller picture, to a new Jerusalem where the unity God gives will never end, it will never be broken and the fragrance, the refreshing dew of the unity that God gives will never fade away.

[47 : 21] Verse 3, for there the Lord bestows his blessing even life forever more. This is a picture in time that is pointing to eternity.

to that forever more life. And John had a revelation of it in Revelation 7. Let me read a few verses from Revelation 7 and verse 9.

John looks in heaven's window and he says, after this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language.

Standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb, they were wearing white robes and they were holding palm branches in their hand and they cried out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God saying, Amen, praise and glory

and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God forever and ever.
[48 : 32] Amen. What a picture John saw there. Every tribe, nation, people, language united in that endless worship.

In Revelation 21, just a few verses from that chapter, John says, then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea. He says, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men and he will live with them and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them and be our God. This is our future hope if we are in Christ. A unity with God and with his people that is never ending.
[49 : 47] But what if you're watching tonight and you're not yet in Christ? Christ? What if you don't know anything of this unity?

What if you don't know God as your God? What if as you think about eternity you have no hope but only a sense of dread?

How can that change? change? Well simply by coming to Jesus and asking for what you do not yet have.

And that takes us to our final point. It's just a word. The unity that is freely offered. And the reason this unity is freely offered to us is because Jesus has already paid for it with his blood.

We simply have to come to him in faith and ask for it. He is the one who took the curse of our sin from us on the cross so that we might be able to have his blessing bestowed upon us.

[51 : 06] He died so that we might receive life even life forever more. We just need to come to him and ask for this unity for this reconciliation with God for this salvation and then we too will have hope.

We too will have and know the reality of that eternal unity and blessing in that new Jerusalem in heaven in Emmanuel's land.

And we'll sing to conclude with that focus on Emmanuel's land. the sands of time are sinking the dawn of heaven breaks the summer morn of sight for the fair sweet morn awakes dark dark dark hath been the midnight but day spring is at hand and glory glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land O Christ he is the fountain the deep sweet well of love the streams on earth have tasted more deep I'll drink above there to an ocean fullness his mercy doth expand and glory glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land with mercy and with judgment my web of time he woe and did use of sorrow well lusted by his love

I'll bless the hand that guided I'll bless the heart that planned when throne where glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land I wrestled on towards heaven gainst storm and wind and tide now like a weary traveler that leaneth on his guide amid the shades of evening while sinks life's lingering sand

[55 : 15] I hail the glory dawning in Emmanuel's land and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all both now and forever more Amen